

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 4042

LIMDIS

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB GR
SUBJECT: GREEK LABOR MINISTER CONCERNED OVER COMMUNIST
TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES

1. AT A RECENT DINNER ATTENDED BY THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR
AND THE EMBASSY'S LABOR REPORTING OFFICER WITH THE PRESIDENT
AND SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF GREEK
WORKERS (GSEE) AND OTHER KEY GREEK TRADE UNION OFFICERS,
MINISTER OF LABOR LASKARIS, WHO WAS ALSO PRESENT, AGAIN
EXPRESSED HIS CONCERN TO US OVER COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES IN
THE GREEK TRADE UNION MOVEMENT. WHILE CLAIMING THAT HE WAS
DOING EVERYTHING HE LEGITIMATELY COULD AS MINISTER OF LABOR
TO ASSIST DEMOCRATIC TRADE UNIONISTS TO RETAIN CONTROL OF
THE GREEK TRADE UNION MOVEMENT, LASKARIS SAID IT WAS
UP TO THE TRADE UNIONISTS THEMSELVES TO WIN THE BATTLE
IN THE FACE OF WHAT HE ADMITTED WAS A VERY SERIOUS AND
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STRONG COMMUNIST CHALLENGE TO GAIN CONTROL EVENTUALLY.
IN THIS CONNECTION, HE REPEATED WHAT HE HAS TOLD US BEFORE
CONCERNING SOVIET EMBASSY DIRECTION AND SUBSTANTIAL
FINANCING OF THESE GREEK COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES.

2. AS LASKARIS SEES IT, WHAT IS NEEDED IS A MORE DYNAMIC
AND MORE EFFECTIVE EFFORT ON THE PART OF DEMOCRATIC TRADE

UNIONISTS IN THEIR ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES. HE CONSIDERS THE COMMUNIST THREAT SO SERIOUS THAT HE DOES NOT EXCLUDE COOPERATION OF THE NON-COMMUNIST TRADE UNION FORCES WITH THOSE ELEMENTS IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT PREVIOUSLY IDENTIFIED WITH THE JUNTA, SOMETHING THAT HE FEARS THE COMMUNISTS ARE ALREADY WORKING ON. IN FACT LASKARIS SEES A DANGER THAT THE COMMUNISTS ARE ALREADY HAVING SOME SUCCESS IN ENTICING SOME OF THESE ELEMENTS TO COOPERATE WITH THEM IN RETURN FOR PERSONAL REWARDS. (IN MANY CASES, THE FORMER JUNTA COLLABORATORS REPRESENT THE BALANCE OF POWER IN INDIVIDUAL UNION OR FEDERATION COUNCILS, INCLUDING THE GSEE.)

3. IN THE BROADER FRAMEWORK OF THIS STRUGGLE WITH THE COMMUNISTS, LASKARIS URGED THE GSEE OFFICIALS TO INTENSIFY THEIR CONTACTS AND EXCHANGES WITH INTERNATIONAL FREE TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS, ESPECIALLY THE ICFTU. IN THIS RESPECT, HOWEVER, BOTH LASKARIS AND THE GSEE OFFICERS MADE THE POINT TO THE TWO AMERICANS PRESENT THAT THEY DID NOT BELIEVE THE ICFTU COULD BE EFFECTIVE IN ASSISTING NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC TRADE UNIONS WITHOUT THE PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP OF THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT. AMERICAN LEADERSHIP WAS ESSENTIAL, THEY EMPHASIZED, FOR EFFECTIVE ICFTU ASSISTANCE TO THOSE OF ITS AFFILIATES WHICH ARE UNDER COMMUNIST PRESSURE.

4. BOTH LASKARIS AND THE GSEE OFFICERS THEN EXPRESSED THEIR CONCERN OVER THE HOSTILITY OF CERTAIN INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION LEADERS, ESPECIALLY "CHRISTIANS" (I.E. WCL),
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THEY SAID, TOWARD THE GREEK LABOR MOVEMENT. THEY MENTIONED THAT THE WCL WAS PUSHING THE CANDIDACY OF ONE OF ITS MEMBERS, HOUTHUYS, FOR A POSITION ON THE LABOR GROUP AT THE ILO ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND THAT THE GREEKS WERE OPPOSING IT AND TRYING QUIETLY TO PREVENT HOUTHUYS FROM BEING CHOSEN. THEY EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO GET AMERICAN TRADE UNION SUPPORT IN THIS EFFORT. (COMMENT: THIS MAY BE ONE OF THE REASONS GSEE SECRETARY GENERAL KARAKITSOS HOPES TO SEE IRVING BROWN IN PARIS LATER THIS MONTH--ATHENS 3684, NOTAL.)

5. COMMENT: IT IS QUITE CLEAR THAT THE DANGER THE COMMUNISTES, WHO ARE APPARENTLY MAKING PROGRESS IN THIS DIRECTION, MAY EVENTUALLY GAIN CONTROL OF THE GREEK LABOR MOVEMENT IS ONE OF LASKARIS' MAIN PREOCCUPATIONS. OVER THE PAST YEAR OR SO HE HAS SPOKEN UP INCREASINGLY, BOTH IN PARLIAMENT AND WHILE TRAVELING AROUND THE COUNTRY, ABOUT THE DANGER THAT EXTREMISTS OF THE LEFT WILL DESTROY GREECE'S DEMOCRATIC TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AND HAS CALLED FOR UNITY IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT TO PRESERVE AND STRENGTHEN

DEMOCRACY IN GREECE. (THE LATTER WAS THE THEME OF HIS MAY DAY MESSAGE TO GREEK WORKERS OVER THE WEEKEND.) HE HAS NOT HESITATED TO POINT THE FINGER PUBLICLY AT THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREECE (KKE-EXTERIOR) AS THE MAIN THREAT TO A DEMOCRATIC AND TRADE UNION MOVEMENT.

6. LASKARIS ENJOYS THE CONFIDENCE OF PRIME MINISTER CARAMANLIS WHO HAS PRACTICALLY GIVEN HIM A FREE HAND IN DEALING WITH TRADE UNION QUESTIONS. WE BELIEVE IT IS IN OUR INTEREST TO ENCOURAGE LASKARIS AND ASSIST HIM, TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE, IN HIS EFFORTS TO PRESERVE AND STRENGTHEN A FREE AND DEMOCRATIC GREEK LABOR MOVEMENT. THE WAY WE CAN HELP IS TO TRY AND INFLUENCE THE AMERICAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT, AND IN PARTICULAR THE AFL-CIO LEADERSHIP, TO TAKE A MORE ACTIVE AND FORTHCOMING ATTITUDE OF SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE TO THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF GREEK WORKERS, ITS VARIOUS FEDERATIONS AND UNIONS. THE GREEKS DESPERATELY
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NEED HELP IN ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS AND THE TRAINING OF CADRE.

7. THE VISIT OF THE US LAST SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER BY GSEE PRESIDENT PAPAGEORGIOU AND SECY GENERAL KARAKITSOS (UNDER IVP SUSPICES) REESTABLISHED GSEE CONTACT WITH THE AFL-CIO, THE UAW AND CERTAIN OTHER AMERICAN TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS. THERE HAVE BEEN A FEW SUBSEQUENT CONTACTS HERE (ATHENS 2825, ATHENS 12560, NOV 26, 1976, NOTAL), AND THE GSEE HAS WRITTEN TO AFL-CIO PRESIDENT MEANY INVITING HIM AND/OR AN AFL-CIO DELEGATION TO VISIT GREECE. WE HOPE THE DEPARTMENT IN ITS CONTACTS WITH THE AFL-CIO, THE UAW AND OTHER MAJOR AMERICAN LABOR ORGANIZATIONS AS APPROPRIATE WILL BE ABLE TO EXPLAIN THE GREEK TRADE UNION SITUATION TO THEM AND URGE THAT THEY TAKE PRACTICAL STEPS TO ASSIST THE GREEK LABOR MOVEMENT. AS APPROPRIATE OPPORTUNITIES PRESENT THEMSELVES, WE SHOULD ALSO USE OUR GOOD OFFICES WITH THE ICFTU AND THE ETUC TO TAKE A MORE ACTIVE INTEREST IN AIDING THE GREEK LABOR MOVEMENT.
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